



United States Mission to the OSCE

Response to the Head of the OSCE Spillover Monitor Mission to Skopje, Carlos Pais, and the EU Special Representative, Erwan Fouéré

As delivered by Chargé d'Affaires Kyle Scott
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
April 6, 2006

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Our delegation would like to welcome Ambassador Pais back to the Permanent Council and to also welcome Ambassador Fouéré. We thank both of them for their reports and frank views on the situation in Macedonia.

In December, the United States welcomed the decision by the European Union to grant candidate status to Macedonia. We are convinced that continued Macedonian attention to fulfilling EU requirements for membership will further improve the lives of all Macedonia's citizens by strengthening democracy and increasing prosperity.

Both speakers today have placed special emphasis on the necessity for free and fair parliamentary elections this summer. This is a critical test of Macedonia's path to Euro-Atlantic integration. Macedonia is to be congratulated for the tremendous progress it has made on many fronts in the past five years. Still, there have been some serious and persistent problems with elections. The international community will be watching closely to see if the upcoming elections are at a level that meets OSCE commitments and standards for fairness and transparency.

The Unified Electoral Code, which was adopted last week by Macedonia's parliament, is an important step in the right direction, in our view. We would welcome further steps by Macedonian authorities to ensure implementation of all recommendations from the OSCE/ODIHR report of the 2005 municipal elections.

Macedonia's political party leaders hold an equally important responsibility to ensure that their members uphold these standards during the campaign and on election day.

Ambassador Pais has also noted uneven progress in the area of rule of law. The work of the OSCE Mission to assist the government through advice and training of police and legal practitioners is clearly one of the most important areas of the Mission's assistance. The Mission is to be commended for making efficient use of resources, and focusing on "training the trainers" with Macedonia's police force.

The United States applauds the steps that the government has taken to improve the effectiveness of the judiciary, including adopting constitutional reforms and a witness

protection law and establishing a unit within the Public Prosecutor's office to fight organized crime.

Nonetheless, we believe much remains to be done to enhance public confidence in a legal system burdened with inefficiencies and susceptible to corruption. We look to the government and parliament to put in place the necessary by-laws for the constitutional amendments. We also encourage continued attention to ensuring equitable representation in the judiciary by recruiting and training ethnic minority judges and prosecutors. We welcome the recent adoption of a National Action Plan to Combat Trafficking in Persons, an area where the government needs to make a major effort to protect victims and to break the criminal rings responsible for this scourge. The government needs to increase victim identification and fully implement its law on witness protection.

Mr. Chairman, when Ambassador Pais reported to the Permanent Council last fall, the United States welcomed the beginning of Macedonia's decentralization process. Much work remains to be done, but we are very encouraged by progress in this area. Clearly, the OSCE Mission's program to train over a thousand local civil servants has played an important role in this advancement.

Again, my country would like to thank both Ambassador Pais and Ambassador Fouéré for their outstanding work, and for their candid reports today.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.